



Photo by Sgt. Sean Kimmons

An Iraqi Police officer (right) guards a polling site while hundreds of anxious voters wait outside in Kirkuk on Jan. 30.

Iraqis defy insurgency to vote

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KIRKUK, Iraq – It was about an hour before the polling site next to the Iraqi Police Highway Patrol station opened here, when a line of anxious Iraqi voters began to form outside on Jan. 30.

Hundreds of Iraqi men and women – equally in force – along with their children, stood in a growing line of determined Iraqis who have never voted in a democratic election in this country before.

Sporadic AK-47 gunfire and rockets launched by insurgents were heard by the crowd of Iraqis when the polling site opened at 7 a.m. Still, they were not intimidated and stayed in line.

These Iraqis demonstrated their desire to follow the road to a better future, and saw the Iraqi elections as a way to help pave that road.

“This is the first time [Iraqis] feel free,” said Mohamad Rasoul, an interpreter with Company B, Task Force 1-21 Infantry. “The true Iraq has started today and I am proud to be a part of it.”

Rasoul voted in the elections, along with many other Iraqis. After each Iraqi voted they dipped one of their fingers in ink. The ink made sure no Iraqi could vote more than once, but also in a way, the ink-stained fingers became a symbol of freedom.

Hassan Hussein walked almost 15 miles to a polling site to cast his ballot.

“It was a long way to walk, but it was worth it,” Hussein said through an interpreter. “I feel very good about today because it’s the first time that there’s going to be a real election in Iraq.”

Iraqi voters cast two separate ballots on Jan. 30. One was for a 275-member National Assembly and the other for Provincial leaders.

Sgt. Richard Allen, a team leader with Co. B, TF 1-21 Inf., witnessed the long lines of Iraqis who waited outside polling sites in the city and felt proud to play a part in their right to vote.

“I feel good about it. It will go down in history of how they got more freedom to do what they want and maybe it will lead on to how [Americans] have it now,” Allen said.

Iraqi Security Forces provided primary security around the polling sites,

while Allen and other Soldiers took up secondary security positions throughout the city. This was important, so the elections would be an Iraqi effort not run by Soldiers.

“It goes to legitimacy,” Maj. Daniel Hurlbut, S3 for 2nd Brigade Combat Team, said about the Iraqi elections.

Even though Soldiers did not participate in the management of the elections or the direct security, it was still important for them to be out there to assist the ISF.

About 4,500 ISF personnel and 1,000 Soldiers, regardless of military occupational specialty, were dedicated to the security of this city on Election Day.

The Soldiers assisted ISF personnel to make sure 583,000 registered voters could vote at 217 polling sites in the Kirkuk Province.

Iraq Election diaries from the field

Days before the election

28 Jan – At 0300, while my team is on the rooftop of the police station, my gunner comments on how quiet it is. Seconds later an RPG impacts and explodes on a building near one of the election centers. The ING soldiers exchange small arms fire with AIF but my team is unable to get into the fight because there is a building blocking our line of sight. The firefight ends as quickly as it began, no injuries, no significant damage. 3rd Squad arrives at 1000 on the 29th to relieve my squad. — **Sgt. Levi B. DURAN**, 31B20 2nd Squad, 2nd Platoon, 272nd Military Police Company, 720th Military Police Battalion, 42nd Military Police Brigade

29 Jan – Bab Al Sheik – Part of the power grid in eastern Baghdad is down for most of the night and early morning. No vehicles and no power make the city almost silent. The only sounds are dogs barking and an Iraqi policeman coughing at a roadblock down the street. **DURAN**